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May 3, 2011

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express serious concern with the situation in Syria. Over the last several weeks, more than 500 peaceful demonstrators have been killed by government security forces, and the Assad regime seems to be pressing ahead with its brutal crackdown. We believe that it is time that the United States pursues a policy on Syria designed to deny the Assad regime the political, economic and technological resources to engage in activities that pose an extraordinary threat to U.S. security, our interests, and our allies.

In 2003, Congress enacted the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act (SALSRA) (P.L. 108-175) in response to Syria's dangerous international policies. SALSRA sought to mandate the imposition of sanctions on Syria for its support for extremism, pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, allowing guerillas to enter Iraq to harm US forces and undermine progress, and its then-occupation of Lebanon. While the occupation has technically (if not functionally) ended, all of the other serious problems remain. Nevertheless, successive administrations have thus far failed to impose the full range of SALSRA sanctions. Today, the danger posed by Syria is continuing to grow as it expands its relations with Iran and murders its own people, and we believe that it is time to strengthen our sanctions and our overall policy.

We welcome your decision on April 29, 2011, to renew the sanctions imposed pursuant to U.S. law and executive orders responding to the National Emergency with Respect to Syria, and to impose new sanctions against several regime officials, Syria's General Intelligence Directorate, and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. We ask that you build on your recent actions by further strengthening U.S. sanctions against the Syrian regime and its enablers in light of both the regime's brutal crackdown and human rights violations against its own people, and the continuing multifaceted threat that the regime continues to pose to the U.S., our allies, and international security.

Mr. President, it has been almost seven years since Presidential authority under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701-1706) and the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003 (Public Law 108-175) was exercised through the issuance of Executive Order 13338. During that time, Syria's "continuing unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States" (as reiterated in multiple Executive Orders) has only grown.

Syria's acquisition of missiles and unconventional weapons, including nuclear capabilities, is well-documented. According to public reports, Syria and North Korea collaborated on a secret nuclear program for eight years since 1997 and jointly built an illicit nuclear facility, known as Al Kibar, which was nearly operational at the time of the Israeli strike that destroyed it on September 6, 2007. Then-Central Intelligence Agency Director Michael Hayden stated that the suspected Syrian nuclear reactor would have produced enough plutonium for making one or two bombs within a year of becoming operational. Additionally, Syria has one of the largest ballistic missile inventories in the Middle East, and reports indicate that Syria has conducted research and development on biological and chemical weapons for decades.

As illustrated by the Country Reports on Terrorism 2009, Syria also continues its sponsorship and provision of critical support to a long list of Palestinian and Islamist extremist organizations, such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and like-minded organizations in Iraq. Syria also reportedly continues to illegally transfer arms, and provide other forms of military support to Hezbollah, in clear violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions 1559, 1680, 1701, and Chapter VII-based UNSCR 1747.

In response, we respectfully urge the full implementation of the following sanctions under the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act:

- Section 5(a)(2)(B)—a prohibition on United States businesses from operating in Syria;
- Section (2)(C) — restricting Syrian diplomats in Washington, D.C., and at the United Nations in New York City, to travel only within a 25-mile radius of Washington, D.C., or the United Nations headquarters building, respectively; and
- Section 5(a)(2)(F)—blocking transactions in any property in which the Government of Syria has any interest, by any person, or with respect to any property, subject to the jurisdiction of the United States.

Additionally, we urge the implementation of the full range of Iran, North Korea and Syria Nonproliferation Act sanctions on any foreign entity that knowingly transfers to Syria goods, services, or technology that materially contribute to Syria's efforts to develop nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons, or ballistic or cruise missile systems.

In the White House's April 22, 2011 press release, you stated that "the United States will continue to stand up for democracy and the universal rights that all human beings deserve, in Syria and around the world." In this respect, we look forward to working with the Administration to immediately reprogram existing funds to provide democracy assistance to secular, democratic and peaceful Syrian activists vetted by the United States. Doing so will demonstrate that the United States will provide substance to our endorsement of the just demands of the Syrian protestors for democracy, and that our words will not ring hollow. We also look forward to working with the Administration to develop a long-term, viable strategy for democracy promotion in Syria.

Finally, we thank the Administration for its efforts and look forward to working with you to engage our allies both bilaterally and in international fora to address the multifaceted challenge that the regime presents to its own people; and to the United States, our interests and allies. We thank you for your time and attention to this matter, and look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
Chairman
Committee on Foreign Affairs

ELIOT L. ENGEL
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere

CC: The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State